

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Pacific Regional Office
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181
Phone: 503/231-6121
Fax: 503/231-2122
<http://pacific.fws.gov>

News Release



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Contact: Susan Saul, (503) 231-6121

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Interior Secretary Norton Announces \$1.8 Million in Grants To Support 40 Cooperative Conservation Projects in Oregon

Interior Secretary Gale Norton today announced \$1.8 million in challenge cost-share grants to support 40 cooperative conservation projects in Oregon, from removing invasive species near Eugene to restoring riparian habitat along two state rivers.

Three of the grants, totaling more than \$108,000, are for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service projects to control invasive species on public and private lands in the Willamette Valley and southeastern Oregon.

A \$38,000 grant matched by \$70,000 in partner contributions will continue an on-going project to restore rare native Willamette Valley prairie and oak savannah on the William L. Finley, Ankeny and Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuges and some private lands. Activities will include hand-pulling, mowing and treating invasive species with herbicides, collecting and propagating native seeds, burning, and planting native plants.

Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge has partnered with neighboring ranchers to control invasive plants such as perennial pepperweed, whitetop, knapweed and Canadian thistle in the Warner Wetlands. A \$20,159 grant will fund technical assistance and herbicide purchase, while the landowners will match the grant with donated labor and equipment to apply the herbicide.

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge staff members will be using a \$50,000 grant to work with landowners in the Silver Creek watershed west of Burns to develop a community-based approach to managing invasive weeds. Landowners, Harney County, the state departments of transportation and agriculture, and the soil and water conservation district will provide a \$54,500 match in donated labor and equipment to treat 2,580 acres.

The grants are part of \$21 million in challenge cost-share grants under President Bush's Cooperative Conservation Initiative to complete 377 conservation projects nationwide in conjunction with states, local communities, businesses, landowners and other partners. The projects involve more than 1,100 partners in 43 states and will conserve, restore or enhance more than 565,000 acres. Overall funding for the projects totals more than \$52 million including the matching contributions of partners.

“The goal of the Cooperative Conservation Initiative is to empower federal land managers to form partnerships within local communities to better care for the land and its wildlife,” Norton said. “By promoting these partnerships, we not only leverage federal conservation dollars with private funds but also tap into the ingenuity and local knowledge of the people who live and work on the land.”

A state-by-state breakout of the grants announced by Norton today is available on the Interior Department Web site, www.doi.gov.

Partners will contribute \$2.6 in matching contributions to the 40 Oregon projects, bringing the total for the state to \$4.4 million.

President Bush proposed the challenge cost-share grants in 2003 as a tool for federal land managers to use in creating cooperative conservation projects. Last year, the department awarded \$12.9 million in grants in 40 states and Puerto Rico. For Fiscal Year 2004, the President proposed and Congress appropriated an increase of more than \$8 million, or 62 percent, in the program.

Overall, the department has awarded nearly \$34 million in grants over the past two years to help more than 1,500 partners complete 633 projects. These projects have conserved, restored or enhanced more than 700,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

The Cooperative Conservation Initiative challenge cost-share grants are part of an overall commitment by the Bush administration to support cooperative conservation efforts. Over the past three years, the Interior Department has provided more than \$1.3 billion in grants to states, tribes, local governments and private landowners.

The projects supported by these grants have restored millions of acres of habitat, removed invasive exotic species, replanted native grasses, improved riparian habitat along thousands of miles of streams, conserved limited water resources and developed conservation plans for endangered species and their habitat.

The President is proposing to build on this success in his Fiscal Year 2005 budget, which includes more than \$507 million to support Interior’s cooperative conservation programs.

“The power of partnership produces results for conservation that far exceed the dollars we put into these partnerships,” Norton said. “By empowering citizens, we are tapping into the greatest conservation resource we have – the American people themselves – and helping them to become citizen-conservationists.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.